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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN NATIONALIST MARCH FIZZLES

REF: MOSCOW 12311

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Summary  
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1. (SBU) Decisive action by the Moscow city authorities and waning enthusiasm for the enterprise produced smaller-than-predicted attendance at the March 4 nationalist "Russian march." In the end, fewer than three thousand Muscovites participated on Saturday, a fraction of the number of police and other law enforcement officials assembled to ensure that there would be no violence. The march may dent the reputation of Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) Chairman Aleksandr Belov, who had seen his star rise in the wake of October inter-ethnic violence in the Karelian city of Kondopoga, but whose efforts to score a public relations coup this time around were thwarted by a city government increasingly intolerant of intolerance. End summary.

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March Disappoints Its Organizers  
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2. (SBU) In the end, the much-ballyhooed November 4 Moscow Russian March (reftel) failed to meet the stated numerical expectations of its chief organizer, the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI). By most estimates, fewer than three thousand participants converged on Deviche Pole, near the Park Kultury metro station in central Moscow, where they joined adherents of the nationalist "People's Will" in staging a peaceful, legal demonstration. The event occurred under the watchful eyes of as many as 8 thousand police and Interior Ministry, and FSB personnel. Backed by water cannons, numerous detention vans, and assisted from above by a circling helicopter, Russian law enforcement (some of the "special police" (OMON) troops were trucked in from as far away as Tver), made it clear that it would vigorously enforce the Moscow city administration's ban on the march. As many as 300 (by some estimates 500 - 600) participants were detained by the police at various stages of the march, including Duma Deputy and former LDPR member Nikolay Kuryanovich.

3. (SBU) As planned, would-be Russian March participants collected the morning of November 4 at the Komsomolskaya metro station, then moved by metro to Park Kultury, where they joined the nationalist "People's Will" in a meeting

sanctioned by city authorities. According to media reports, DPNI efforts to communicate their movements via SMS were stymied by electronic interference. Participants arriving at Park Kultury metro station were met by a phalanx of "special police" units standing, shoulder-to-shoulder, from the metro station exit to the entrance of the park. Any participant carrying a sign or displaying a flag or banner not to the liking of the authorities was immediately hustled off to waiting detention vans. Participants --overwhelmingly young, working-class males-- sporadically chanted "Kondopoga" (the Karelian locus of an October inter-ethnic confrontation that has entered DPNI lore), "Russia for Russians," "Moscow for Muscovites," "Forward, Russia," and "Glory to Russia." A few young participants offered the Nazi salute for the cameras, although they were actively discouraged from doing so by "People's Will" Chairman Sergey Baburin. Sprinkled among the crowd of thousands were a few anti-Semitic signs, one terming Chechens the "Jews of the Caucasus." A Japanese cameral crew near Poloff was the occasional target of muttered complaints about the presence of "Chinese (sic) horse faces," but march participants willingly offered the journalists their views, and there was no threat of physical violence.

14. (SBU) The rally itself was anticlimactic. There were less-than-memorable speeches by "People's Will" Chairman Sergey Baburin, and by Duma deputies Kuryanovich (formerly of LDPR) and Andrey Savelyev (formerly of Rodina). Baburin prevented an obviously-disgruntled DPNI leader Aleksandr Belov, who was on the tribune, from making remarks; presumably because DPNI had been denied permission to march. Belov nevertheless through a megaphone attacked Presidential Administration Deputy Head Vladislav Surkov, allegedly for ordering Baburin via cellphone to prevent Belov from speaking.

15. (SBU) The participants, in conversations with Embassy,

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suggested that they had different agendas for the rally. One young man expressed the sentiment, echoed by others, that gatherings of ethnic Russians are too often portrayed as "extreme nationalist" or even "fascist," while the assemblies of members of other nationalities are treated more neutrally.

A young woman complained that the current Russian government was not devoting enough attention to ethnic Russians. Others worried that illegal immigrants were taking their jobs and were the source of crime in Moscow.

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Anti-Nationalist March  
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16. (SBU) Complementing the more nationalistic Russian march was a second, smaller rally, held to counter the collection of nationalists on Deviche Pole. The fewer than one thousand persons participating were treated to speeches by Union of Right Forces Chairman Belykh, Yabloko party Deputy Chairman Sergey Mitrokhin, and Moscow Helsinki Fund Chair Lyudmila Alekseyeva. As at its counterpart rally, police presence was heavy, and the rally took place without incident although, again, there were a few preemptive detentions.

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Comment  
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17. (SBU) The decisive action of the Moscow city government no doubt played the key role in countering the intentions of some on the right to turn this year's march into a pitched battle between the police and the demonstrators. The overwhelming presence of large numbers of police at the place of the demonstrations and at checkpoints throughout the city made it clear that violence in Moscow would not be tolerated.

At the same time, although some Duma deputies participated in the rally, and there was much heated rhetoric in the

run-up to November 4, much of the original enthusiasm seemed to have evaporated by the day of the march itself. DPNI and its leader Aleksandr Belov had received ever more frequent media coverage in the wake of the October ethnic conflict in Kondopoga. Their failure to ride that wave to even more prominence on November 4 may make them less attractive to those seeking a vehicle for exploiting festering resentments here. Moscow Mayor Luzhkov's forceful rejection of the march shows the important role that leadership from above can play in thwarting efforts to create unrest.

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